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The Ancestral Trail

AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS

8 Enlil's Dungeon

Dicing with Death in the Bubbling Volcano

Fulek Heller ®

UK £1.75 IR £1.75

From a story by Frank Graves

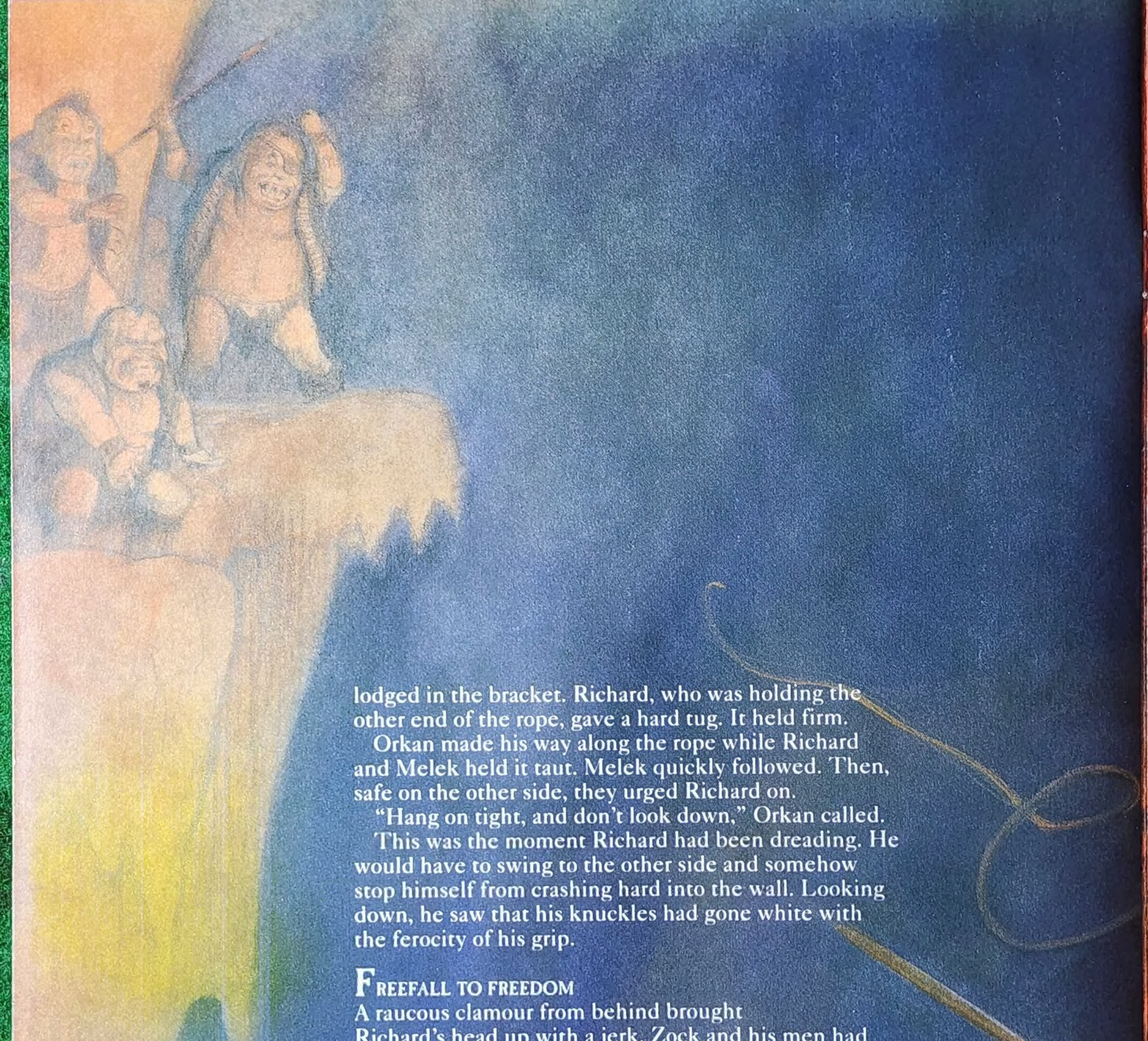
On the Eighth Day . . .

Cross the gap without mishap,
An arrow saves the day.
Find the side but Chosen falls,
Save him fast! Then at last
From blazing fires comes the glow.
And then you know that air reveals,
The pod to feel, and Evil steals
The beasts to meet the blow.

No easy solution suggested itself as Richard peered into the huge rip that ran deep into the mountain, slicing through the tunnel like a knife. The trio could neither cross, nor go back. "There must be a way," Richard thought in despair. His eyes lit on Melek's rope, then he gazed across the chasm. The line of oily torches continued on the other side of the gap.

"If you tie Melek's rope to an arrow, and fire it over that metal clamp," Richard said to Orkan, after a moment's thought, "you could get across while we hold the rope, Melek can follow and I'll swing across."

Orkan's eyes narrowed as he calculated the odds. Without a word, he unslung his bow and tied one end of the rope to an arrow. He took a deep breath and fired. The arrow soared over the chasm and



lodged in the bracket. Richard, who was holding the other end of the rope, gave a hard tug. It held firm.

Orkan made his way along the rope while Richard and Melek held it taut. Melek quickly followed. Then, safe on the other side, they urged Richard on.

"Hang on tight, and don't look down," Orkan called.

This was the moment Richard had been dreading. He would have to swing to the other side and somehow stop himself from crashing hard into the wall. Looking down, he saw that his knuckles had gone white with the ferocity of his grip.

Freefall to freedom

A raucous clamour from behind brought Richard's head up with a jerk. Zock and his men had appeared and were almost upon him. He swallowed nervously, crammed his torch into his pocket and stepped into space.

One moment, Richard was dropping into the black chasm, the next, his feet struck solid rock on the other side. He took a deep breath and began to scramble up the rope. At the same time, on the ledge above, Orkan and Melek hauled as hard as they could, and watched Zock's men anxiously.

As Richard climbed, a spear whizzed off the rock by his face. He redoubled his efforts, feeling the skin

scrape away from his knees and knuckles as he scrambled, half climbing, half pulled, up the wall of the abyss. Then there was a sudden lurch.

"What's happening?" Richard called up.

"The bracket's going!" Orkan yelled back.

A CLOSE CALL

The bracket, with rope attached, was working loose from its moorings. Orkan managed to get a better grip on the rope and urged Melek to pull harder, and Richard to climb faster.

More clubs and knives landed at their feet as Richard clambered over the edge, and crawled on elbows and knees to safety. Orkan left him no time to catch his breath. "Let's get out of here quick," he shouted.

They shot up and ran straight ahead down the sooty tunnel. Soon the torches petered out, and were replaced by a faintly luminous green glow that came from the very rock.

After a while, the tunnel divided into two. Richard turned to Melek. "Let's see what the *Book of Prophecies* says," he murmured. As Melek

read, Richard started to frown.

"The tunnel splits here, so we must be at the point where the darkness is rent," he said, "I'll check the Path Finder.

"Down there," he said after a while, returning the instrument to Melek and pointing to the right-hand tunnel.

As they advanced over sharp flints and pebbles, the trio noticed that the air bore a faint smell of burning. The tunnel opened out into a deep, wide cavern. A narrow path zigzagged across to a monstrous craggy wart that rose in the cave's centre from dark, shadowy depths.

"That must be Enlil's dungeon," Richard said in a low voice.

The crater's sandy yellow sides were wrinkled by years of lava flow and a faint ribbon of smoke rose from its centre. The volcano was still active.

Hounds of hell

Nothing stood between the trio and total void as they picked their way between the crumbling edges of the path. Suddenly Orkan jabbed Richard in the ribs and tilted his head up – they had reached the entrance to Enlil's dungeon.

A pair of thick, iron-studded doors was let

into a vertical slab of lava. A long, heavy sword, set crosswise on massive iron supports, secured the doors shut. On either side, tethered to the rock by a thick chain, stood a huge, savage-looking dog.

The dogs' eyes stared blindly ahead, their pupils small black pinpoints at the centre of bright golden embers. The beasts' heavy jaws were bared to display blade-sharp teeth, and beneath the dogs' spiked collars bulged barrel-chested bodies. The animals were straining forwards, snarling and pawing the air with their claws.

Orkan turned to Melek and Richard. "I'll keep them busy while you open the doors," he said, "but you'll have to be quick."

Orkan slid his sword out of its scabbard and the sharp blade whipped the air. The slavering dogs raged forward, pulling the heavy chains so taut that Richard thought

they were going to fly out of their heavy metal anchors. Just out of the dogs' reach, Orkan flourished his weapon, and its tip glanced a dog's lip. The white foam became a shower of blood-coloured spittle.

As Orkan ducked and dived in front of the raging dogs, Richard and Melek slipped under the stretched-out chains and started pushing the heavy sword up.

Summoning up every ounce of their strength, Richard and Melek strained and pushed. Hot pain shot through Richard's back and arms, but he arched against the door, and at last the sword swung up on a pivot from its ancient brackets.

Richard and Melek pushed the massive doors ajar and stepped inside. Whatever lay ahead was cloaked in darkness.

Richard turned to Melek. "Wait here," he said, "I'm going back to help Orkan."

Darting under the clunking chain, he ran to Orkan. "I'll take over," he commanded, "get inside, quick."

As Orkan ducked under the chain, Richard drew out Juroot's dagger and pulled the hood of his tunic over his head. Everything swam in front of his eyes, then his vision was normal again. For a moment, the two dogs were stunned into silence. Their foe had disappeared before their eyes, leaving a weapon floating in mid-air.

Into the volcano

The dagger whirled past the bemused beasts and Richard crashed into Orkan just as he reached the door. The dogs howled in anger as the three made their way into the gloom of a tunnel quite unlike the one they had fled through earlier. This was flanked by carved columns, and carefully engineered beams arched across the ceiling. It was like being in a cathedral.

As the three moved slowly down the tunnel, the air got warmer and warmer. At the same time, the tunnel itself became lower and narrower. After a while, howls and groaning drifted towards them, at first indistinct, then louder and clearer. The tunnel ended abruptly in an untidy pile of boulders. As they crept over the top, the three companions saw a gigantic cave.

At the centre, a sulphurous, bubbling hole heaved and spat molten rock. Shuffling slowly along a narrow path that jagged and turned around the seething cauldron, surged a wailing chain of beasts. Creatures of all kinds hauled massive logs and tree trunks to feed the searing flames. Despite their obvious pain, the look in their eyes was one of hypnotised obedience.

High above the lava cauldron sat two huge, menacing bats. Scalloped, black wings spread threateningly at their sides. Slitted, bloodshot eyes surveyed the scene below with intense concentration. In front of them, mounted on a tall, intricate stand made from tiny interlocking bones, rested a small purple object.

"The pod!" Richard exclaimed in delight. Then he added in a whisper, "They must be Enlil and Erna."

"How on earth are we going to get close enough to get the pod?" Orkan asked. "It's right in front of them."

Richard felt the hood of Golan's tunic flutter at the

back of his neck and turned round. The vague outline of the Guardian's face shimmered darkly on the lava walls. "Of course," he thought to himself.

"Get ready to distract those two while I get the pod," Richard commanded, pointing to some rocks and boulders nearby. Then he pulled the hood of his tunic over his head.

At that instant, Orkan and Melek took a step forward into the glowing light near the raging cauldron. Enlil and Erna saw the intruders immediately. In confused rage, they flapped their giant wings, ready to attack.

Orkan and Melek seized stones in either hand, and started hurling a steady stream of projectiles at their menacing enemies. One of Orkan's missiles hit the tall stem of a thin chalk-white column. As it snapped, the column loosened a giant upside-down crown of stalactites that hung above Enlil and Erna, unleashing a storm of stone spears.

A sharp stalactite caught in the chain that held an amulet around Enlil's neck, wrenching off the symbol of evil and hurling it into the bubbling lava. Then the volley of stone spears pierced the bats' vast wings and jabbed at their huge bodies. The evil pair tumbled screaming into the cauldron.

In the background, Melek and Orkan saw the pod rise from its macabre stand.

"He's got it," Orkan murmured, as the pod floated towards them, riding an invisible air current.

March of evil

"Let's go," Richard shouted, joining his companions under a hail of sharp stones.

As they scrambled back towards the tunnel, there was an ear-searing screech, then silence. The trio ran on down the corridor without a backward glance. Then a raw, frightening sound filled the air. The beasts were crying out with one pained voice. The trio ran on desperately, followed by the rhythmic hammering of heavy footfalls. Turning back, they saw a flood of Enlil's slaves advancing towards them. Their eyes were glazed, their march unstoppable.

Orkan and Richard drew their swords, and looked at one another. Each saw his thoughts reflected in the other's eyes. This was the end, the last stand of good against overwhelming evil.

Shoomi's Sanctuary

Come into this ancient domain and use your powers of observation to find . .

Shoomi and Shoobi

The friendly pair are still hot on our heroes' trail, but the harrowing experiences they witnessed in Zock's cave prompted them to find another route around Enlil's Dungeon.

In issue 7, Shoomi and Shoobi can be seen cowering behind a boulder on page 106.

Enlil's Minions

3-Minute Challenge

A number of Enlil's troops are hiding somewhere in the illustrations in this issue. Can you find five hidden bats in less than three minutes? You will need to look very closely for them, they have been well concealed!

In issue 7, the fragment of the Evil One's mask was on page 99.
Zock's pendant had fallen on the rocks at the bottom of page 104.

Did you beat the challenge? If not try again this time!

Monsters and Magic

Read about Cerberus and the Fire Giant on Morbane's story cards, then decide which of these characters Enlil is based on.

In issue 7, Zock was based on Cannibal Zim.

Check your answers in the next issue.

The Ancestral Trail

Cut out the locator cards and tokens and keep them safe. More will be given at regular intervals. Details about the role-playing game and how to play it will appear in future issues.

CORRECTION

In issue 3, some information in Shoomi's Sanctuary was incorrect. Answers for issue 2 should read: Fragments of the Evil One's mask were on pages 20, 22 and 32. The Tolosh were based on Gilikango.

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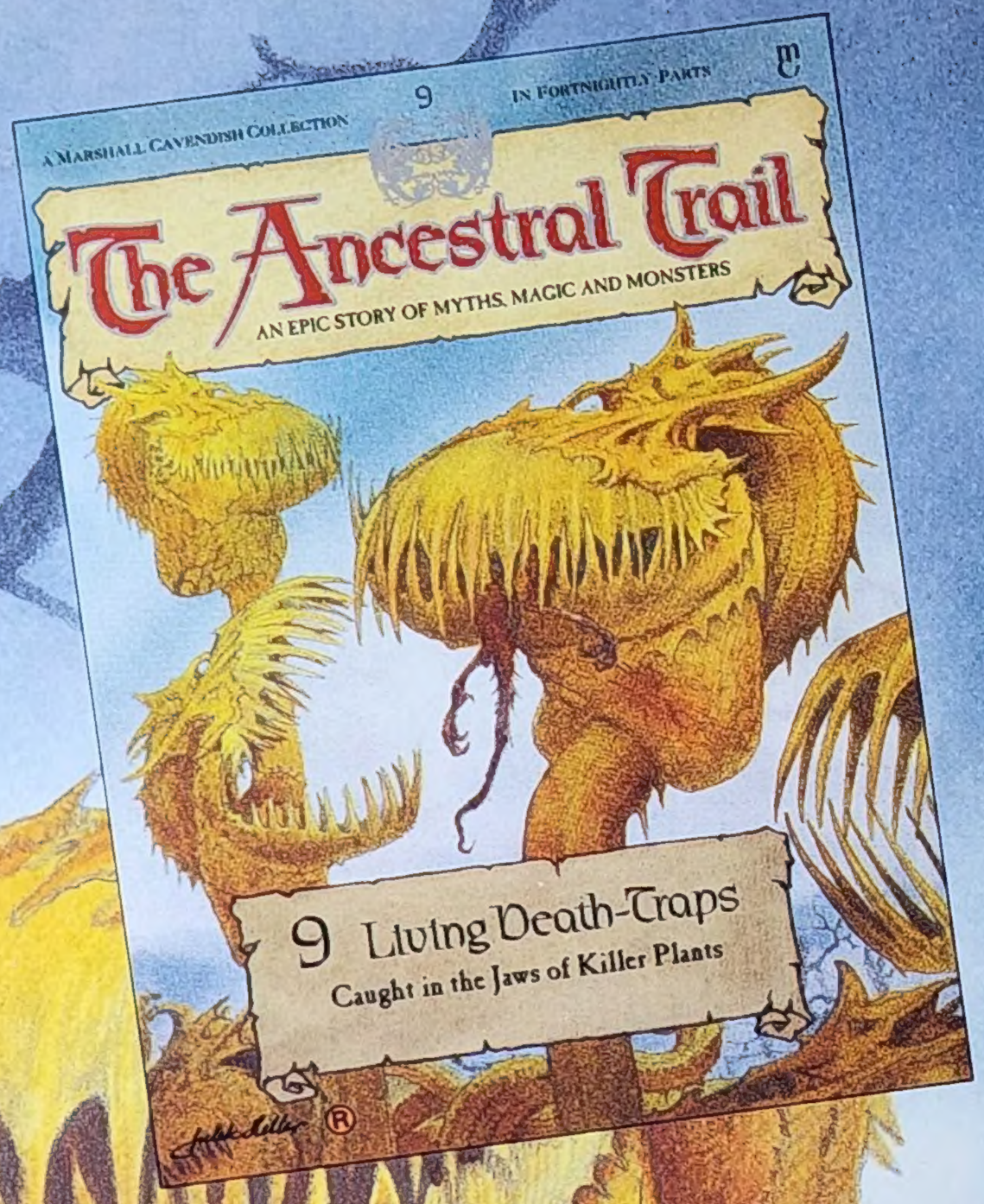
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IN FORTNIGHTLY PARTS
The Ancestral Trail
AN EPIC STORY OF MYTHS, MAGIC AND MONSTERS
9 Living Death-Traps
Caught in the Jaws of Killer Plants

In Issue 9

Living Death-Traps

Melek has a near escape when he attempts a daring rescue – then things hot up fast in the Dead Wood.

plus

- Morbane tells us about some interesting plants.
- Another piece for the puzzle map.
- A location recorder for the role-playing game.

Coming in Issue 10

Zibella's Fortress

A raging whirlpool drags our heroes into the watery depths, where sorcery and witchcraft await their journey's end!

plus

Tales of magic and mayhem from Morbane • More tokens for **The Ancestral Trail** role-playing game.

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